

Aquila and Priscilla

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Date: 27 April 2025

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[0 : 0 0] When I was young, people would ask me, what do you want to be when you grow up? Now that I am grown up, the question has changed. What would you like to be as you grow older?

Who would you like to be like as you grow older? We've all got people we look up to and we want to be more like. I'd like to think that as Christians, the ultimate answer to that question is, well, I want to be like Jesus Christ.

I want to be more like him in the way I think, in the way I speak, and in the way I act. But there are others at a lower level in the Bible to whom we look up and aspire to be more like.

For me, one of these people, or rather should I say two of these people, are Aquila and Priscilla. Aquila and Priscilla are the ultimate husband and wife team.

And they are outstanding examples of Christians fully engaged in Christ's mission for the church and the world. And this evening, I want us to briefly explore together various aspects of their ministry under four headings.

[1 : 1 5] Aquila and Priscilla were partners, pilgrims, evangelists, and hospitable. They are outstanding examples of how Christian couples should view their joint ministry, fully engage in Christ's mission for the church and the world together.

But just in case we think that this message tonight is only for couples, the vast majority of it applies just as powerfully to our mission as individual believers.

Are there any Christians to whom you look up and aspire to be more like in this church? Perhaps you have some Aquilas and Priscillas in mind. So first of all then, Aquila and Priscilla were partners.

Partners. We first meet them in Acts 18 verse 2. We learn that Aquila was a Jew from the Roman province of Pontus, which is located in modern-day northern Turkey.

We don't know where Priscilla originally came from. Sometimes she's called Prisca rather than Priscilla. What we do know about them is that they are always mentioned together and never mentioned apart.

[2 : 3 7] Whether in Acts 18, Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 16, or 2 Timothy 4, they are always referred to as a couple.

Sometimes Priscilla is the first to be mentioned. So rather than it being Aquila and Priscilla, it's Priscilla and Aquila. Commentators suggest that perhaps Priscilla was a Roman citizen of a higher rank in society than her husband, but we don't know that for sure.

What we do know is they were inseparable partners in ministry. We can't think of Aquila without thinking of Priscilla, and we can't think of Priscilla without thinking of Aquila.

They're joined at the hip. They're fellow workers in the gospel. To all intents and purposes, they are not two individuals. They are one. Whatever they did, they did together.

They were fully invested in each other's ministries. In Acts 18, we find them in Corinth. From verse 3, we learn that, like Paul, they were tent makers by trade.

[3 : 48] Now, tent making is a general term for those who worked with leather. It doesn't say that only Aquila was a tent maker. It says they were both tent makers.

They worked together in business, just like Adam and Eve were given the mandate by God to work the garden and care for it. So, Aquila and Priscilla worked together. They shared every aspect of their lives with one another.

They're a partnership, not just in name, but in practice. Aquila couldn't have done the things he did for the gospel without Priscilla's help.

And Priscilla couldn't have done the things she did for the gospel without Aquila's help. They're both together in the work as one. Ministry wasn't Aquila's job while Priscilla worked with the tents, or vice versa.

What they did, they did together. They are the best husband and wife team in the Bible, bar none. The ideal, really. As we'll see in a few minutes, when they met Apollos, both of them took a hand in leading him to faith in Christ.

[5 : 00] So, this is a vexed question. And much debated. There are many points of view, and I confess that I've not come down firmly on any side.

The question is this, and we can talk about it later over tea, coffee, and toast. To what extent is my wife, Kathmar, an essential part of my ministry?

When a connexion calls a minister, are they calling his wife also? Is she an unpaid assistant minister?

Or is the minister's wife his wife, with no special ministry in the connexion, other than to be a faithful member, to work at her career, to look after her home, and children?

Now, I know ministers who come down on both sides of the fence. Some say, my wife is my wife. When the connexion called me, they didn't call her.

[5 : 59] Her role is to be my wife, not to feel pressured into being overly involved in the life of the connexion. Others will say, well, my wife and I are a team.

I couldn't do my ministry without her. She has as much a role to play in the church as I do. I've heard some minister's wives say, the ministry is my husband's job, not mine.

I've heard other minister's wives say, we're in this together. And I get both positions. But we have the biblical example of Aquila and Priscilla, who are a team in the ministry.

Nevertheless, we know that the apostle Peter was married, and there's no mention of his wife being involved in the ministry. At the end of the day, I'm not sure it's a black and white thing, other than that the answer might lie in the temperament of the minister and his wife.

I couldn't do the work of ministry here in Crow Road without Kathmer. And she loves being part of the ministry here in Crow Road as much as I do.

[7 : 13] We're a team ministry. So by definition, when you called me, you called her. We're in this together, but perhaps other ministers would think different. We can talk about that after the service.

The point is that when it came to their ministry, you can't think of Aquila without Priscilla, and vice versa. Never mind those of us in full-time ministry.

When it comes to how a Christian couple works in the church, we've got to be in it together as husbands and wives. A good question for us to ask is this.

To what extent am I and my husband partners in ministry? To what extent are we fellow workers in the gospel?

If you'd ask Priscilla and Aquila, do you agree with team ministry that have eagerly nodded their heads and said, yeah, yeah, yeah, look, we're a team. For those who are younger among us, sitting up there in the balcony, when you're thinking about a possible life partner, do not merely follow your hormones, although that's not easy.

[8 : 23] Ask yourselves, can I serve together in ministry with this person? Can we serve the Lord together as one? Are we a team in this?

Are we fellow workers? The answer to that question will go some way to helping you discern whether this person with whom you are falling in love is right for you or not and is God's person for you or not.

So Aquila and Priscilla were partners. Second, they were pilgrims. They were pilgrims. Now, this couple didn't have it easy.

On one hand, they were successful in business. Priscilla may have been a high-ranking Roman citizen. They had a happy and fulfilled marriage. They seemed to have been fairly wealthy.

But for all that, they are what we would call refugees. Refugees. In Acts 18, we learn they had come to Corinth, which is in western modern-day Greece, from Rome in Italy.

[9 : 31] In AD 49, according to history, there was a purge of Jews from Rome, probably caused by friction over the growing Christian movement. Because they were Christians, Aquila and Priscilla were forced to leave Rome behind them and settle in the city of Corinth.

Here's where we find them in Acts chapter 18. So, Paul came to Corinth. He began to reason in the synagogue with the Jews. Every Sabbath tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

It wasn't long before his ministry began to attract the hatred of the Jews and they became violent. In verse 6, we read they opposed him and reviled him. In verse 12, we read the Jews attacked Paul and dragged him before a tribunal.

The Roman proconsul passed the buck of judgment back to the Jews who proceeded to engage in beating up new Christians and threatening Paul. As a result, we read that Paul, together with Aquila and Priscilla, left Corinth behind and sailed for Ephesus.

That's in modern-day western Turkey. Paul spent some time in Ephesus but then left for Antioch, present-day Syria. However, Aquila and Priscilla stayed in Ephesus and set up home there.

[10 : 54] It's from Ephesus, as we'll see later, they met Apollos and led him to Christ. From Romans chapter 16, verse 3, we learn that Aquila and Priscilla seemed later to have moved back to Rome.

But they seemed to have moved back to Ephesus soon after. We don't know for sure. The point is, they did not let the grass grow under their feet.

They didn't stay anywhere for long, largely because, as prominent Christians, they became targets for persecution. They didn't really have somewhere they could call home, as such, like I do.

Their faith in Jesus meant they had to move to various places. Aquila and Priscilla were strangers in strange lands. But for them, that was fine because, for them, home was not on earth but in heaven with the Lord Jesus.

Tell me, would we be willing to leave our homes for the sake of the Lord Jesus? We spend the vast majority of our time and our money in our houses.

[12 : 05] They're precious to us. Close the curtains, feel safe. The world outside can be going utterly mad. As long as I can enjoy my home, I'm fine. We can arrange each room to make ourselves feel comfortable.

It's my space. For many Christians in our world today, home isn't a thing. Houses burned down, forced to leave like Aquila and Priscilla are their refugees.

Would we be willing to leave our homes for Jesus? What if the Lord called us into the full-time ministry of the gospel? Would we be willing to sell up and move somewhere different for Him?

Or what if a persecution arose against Christians and we're forced to sell our houses and leave Glasgow and all its familiarity behind? Would we be willing for the sake of Christ and His gospel to do that?

That's what Priscilla and Aquila did. Perhaps the nature of their pilgrimage! pilgrimage is enough to challenge us as to whether we hold on too tightly to what we call home.

[13 : 18] We need to be more portable for Jesus. They were pilgrims. Third, they were evangelists. Priscilla and Aquila were evangelists. Never do we see them working together as a team more clearly than in the case of Apollos in Acts 18, 24 through 28. He was a Jewish teacher.

He came from Alexandria in Egypt where many Jews lived and was a center of academic learning in the whole world of the day. We learn that he was an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures, that's the Old Testament.

He'd been instructed in the way of the Lord. Apollos was a brilliant speaker. He knew his Bible and he knew about Jesus but as we later read he knew only the baptism of John.

In other words, he didn't know about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus nor did he know about how the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the church. In other words, for all that he knew, he wasn't yet a Christian.

[14 : 24] For all that he knew, he wasn't yet a Christian. On one of their visits to the synagogue in Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos speaking and they discerned that for all this man's intelligence and talents, he was not yet a believer in Christ.

We read therefore that when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. The fact that Priscilla is the first mentioned in verse 26 is very unusual in the culture of the day and it may indicate that actually it was Priscilla who took the initiative with explaining the Christian gospel to Apollos, not her husband.

It was her. Now you can imagine the scene. After the synagogue service, Priscilla and Aquila invite Apollos back to their home where over a meal they talk to him about the death and resurrection of Jesus and what it all means.

They explain to Apollos the deeper meaning behind these events, that Jesus was the Lamb of God who was sacrificed to take away our sins, that he was raised on the third day to declare God's victory over death.

The word explained in verse 26 literally means to convey information by careful elaboration, to convey information by careful elaboration.

[15 : 56] So in the context of this private conversation around the dinner table, Priscilla and Aquila convey information about Jesus by carefully elaborating on who he was, what he had done, and the significance of his saving work.

At the age of 15 years old, I thought I was a Christian. Having been brought up in the Free Church of Scotland, I had memorised the whole catechism.

We had to when we were young. I had learned large parts of the Bible just so I could get my name in the back page of the monthly record. Do you remember that? Yeah? Not monthly record.

Instructor. I went to both morning and evening services in the Free Church in my village. One Sunday, I was invited to someone's house for lunch.

They took a special interest in me. Over the course of the meal, he and his wife took me through Norman Warren's little book, Journey Into Life.

[17 : 03] I've got loads of copies in my study. I should have taken one in here and showed you it. If you want it, speak to me. It's a little evangelistic booklet which talks about how to become a Christian.

I realised that Sunday in September 1987 that for all my knowledge and ability, like Apollos, I knew only the baptism of John.

I wasn't a Christian. Like Aquila and Priscilla, this older Christian couple, Bob and Shirley Senior, both of them led me to the Lord and the rest is history.

A word here to all of us. Can we not do the same? Perhaps there is someone that we have met and developed an interest in in this church who is not yet a Christian.

Can we invite them back to the house for a meal? Can we, over that meal, talk to them about what it means to be a Christian? How to become a Christian? Can we be the evangelists Priscilla and Aquila were?

[18 : 14] We don't need to be married to do this. All we need is to have a passion for evangelism and if you can't cook, just order stuff in from the local kebab house. Restaurant, sorry.

who knows? We have no record of Aquila and Priscilla leading thousands of souls to Christ.

But we have every record, we have every reason to believe that Apollos was the finest gospel preacher in the early church and thousands were saved through his ministry.

In other words, though few people were saved through the ministry of Aquila and Priscilla, thousands were saved through the ministry of the one who was saved through their ministry.

The person who was saved through your evangelism may go on to become a far more prolific evangelist than you. Well, we can only pray. Well, lastly, Aquila and Priscilla were hospitable.

[19 : 21] Hospitable. By far, what they're best known for is their hospitality. So when the apostle Paul arrived in Corinth, he stayed with them. Perhaps they picked up their evangelistic zeal from him, we don't know, more on that later.

Paul was a tent maker also, so it made sense for him to join his efforts with theirs, so he stayed with them during his time in Corinth. Having traveled with Paul to Ephesus, they set up their home there.

When Paul writes his letter to 1 Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 16, verse 19, he sends their greetings. After all, they had left many friends behind them in Corinth.

But what we read in 1 Corinthians 16, verse 19, is fascinating. Aquila and Priscilla, together with the church in their house, send you greetings.

Having relocated to Ephesus, it didn't take Aquila and Priscilla long to open up their house and start a church there. See how hospitable they were?

[20 : 32] They held services of worship in their house. Remember, it's the early church, there are no church buildings as we understand them, Christians meet in each other's houses. So, from Romans 16, I know I'm taking you about a bit in the Bible here, we learn that from Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila move back to Rome.

And we learn, we read Paul's words to them in Romans 16, verse 3 through 5. He writes to them, but in Rome, remember, greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, probably a reference to the violence in Corinth here in Acts 18, to whom not only I give thanks, but all the churches of the Gentile give thanks as well.

Now listen to this, greet also the church in their house. So, having moved from Ephesus where they had a church in their house, they moved to Rome and the first thing they did in Rome was open up their house and begin another church there.

You know, we're beginning to see a pattern here of intentional hospitality. Hospitality not just for the sake of it, but hospitality with the intention of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

The last time we read of them is in 2 Timothy 4, verse 19, by which time they seem to have moved back to Ephesus. 2 Timothy was written to Timothy while he was pastoring the church in Ephesus.

[22 : 06] Remember, Western Turkey. And Paul writes to him saying, greet Prissa and Aquila. We don't read of them having a church in their house in Ephesus later, but who knows?

Timothy may have been a regular guest in their house. He may even have stayed there. Now, they say that an Englishman's house is his castle. Well, I'm not an Englishman, but this may or may not be true.

If it is true, these two, Aquila and Priscilla, had a castle, the gate of which was always open and never closed.

They viewed their home not as theirs, but as God's, and an important tool for the ministry of the gospel. Are our homes private places?

We never open out to others. Are we hospitable? Tell me, what did Aquila and Priscilla get out of using their home for hospitality?

[23 : 14] What did they get out of it? Well, in the first instance, we can speculate, they learned much from those who stayed with them. They learned much from those who stayed with them.

So, for example, in Acts 18, we learn that Paul stayed with them during his time in Corinth, and perhaps it was then through his instruction and his example that they became enthusiastic about mission and spreading the gospel.

They grew as Christians by hosting Paul in their house. You know, in the same way, Catherine and I will tell you that we have learned much from hosting Christians in our home to whom we have offered hospitality.

George Berwer, late George Berwer, head of OM and founder of it. Patrick Jock, remember Patrick Jock? We learned so much about how to be Christians from having these men in our houses.

Try it, and you might find that you get far more from those you offer hospitality to than you give them. Well, secondly, Aquila and Priscilla received the thanks of other Christians.

[24 : 26] We read in Romans 16, verse 4, that all the churches of the Gentiles gave them thanks. Why is that? It's because we know that Aquila and Priscilla began house churches in at least Ephesus and Rome, if not in other places.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of Gentiles became Christians and grew as Christians through these house churches. What a credit to this couple that through them God planted churches in many places.

Now, they weren't at the front of the operation like Paul and Timothy were, but without them, there would have been little or no lasting church in Ephesus or Rome. Again, how can we use our homes for the growth of the church?

Can we offer meals? Can we offer them as places for the growth of Crow Road Free Church? And then, in the final instance, you know, there are people in heaven today, perhaps thousands of them, because of what Aquila and Priscilla did.

They're in heaven, not in hell, because of the intentional gospel hospitality offered by this couple. While in their house, Aquila and Priscilla shared not just their food with them, but Christ as well, can you conceive of a greater privilege than that there are people in heaven today because of your witness about Christ to them?

[26 : 07] That they're enjoying eternal life with Jesus today because you shared a dodgy curry with them? You went out of your way to open up your home and your heart to them?

I've said it often. My kids know this. I have modeled the parenting of my children on Matthew Ndungu, Alice Cowan's brother, and Shoshu's son, who passed away just over two years ago.

He was one of the finest examples of a father I ever knew. When it comes to our relationship with our marriage partners, let's make sure that we make more effort to imitate Aquila and Priscilla than the Hollywood couples we see on our TVs and watch on our box sets.

And if we could interview Aquila and Priscilla, have them in front of us right now, have a wee talk show like Parkinson, have them in front of us, sit down on the couch and ask them, what makes you such a great team? They'd answer, our common faith in Jesus Christ and desire to see the church grow.

And then if you ask them, why do you do so much? Priscilla would answer, Piper, we've done nothing. Aquila and me have done nothing. Jesus did it all by dying on the cross for us.

[27 : 32] And if you'd ask one final question, maybe Aquila would answer this one. Was it all worth it? He would answer, a million times yes. A million times yes.

Because to live for Jesus, to use our home for Jesus, to use our energy for Jesus, is the most exciting and fulfilling life you can live.

You know, we couldn't take any better New Testament example for imitation than Aquila and Priscilla. by the grace of Jesus, may people say of us, and if we're couples, our relationship with our wives and husbands, they did what they could for Jesus.

Jesus. Thank you.